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Painting “the Red City”

Oscar Bluemner’s Jersey Silkmills

Roberta Smith Favis

What irritation of offensively red brick is this, red as poor-man’s flesh?

—William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (1946)

These lines from William Carlos Williams’s modernist American epic provide an apt epigraph for Oscar Bluemner’s paintings of the textile mills of Paterson, New Jersey. The artist’s depictions of *Jersey Silkmills* (frontispiece) combine modernist aesthetics with personal, social, and political concerns. Thirty years later, Williams, by choosing Paterson as a fitting microcosm in which to set his poetic meditation upon “the mind of modern man and the city,” echoed Bluemner’s realization that this gritty New Jersey town of immigrant workers, with its history of labor strife, could stand for the essence of America.¹

Oscar Bluemner (1867–1938; fig. 1) first sketched and painted his view of Paterson’s silk factories against the backdrop of Garrett Mountain around 1911. Five years later he radically revised this work in watercolor and then in oil. During the interim, much had changed for both the artist and the city. Contacts with European modernism abroad and at home had transformed Bluemner’s artistic language. In addition, the nationalism evoked by World War I had rendered the artist’s German birth

problematic. His selection of this New Jersey town as a distinctly American subject had also become highly charged. The Paterson Silk Strike and Pageant of 1913, when laborers struck for better working conditions and then dramatized their plight in a pageant at Madison Square Garden, brought the city into the national spotlight. These events inevitably colored the public reception of Bluemner’s works that depicted the embattled silk factories.

Just as the formal unity of Williams’s lines hinges on the repetition of the word “red,” the final aesthetic structure of *Jersey Silkmills* coalesces around the color itself. However, for Bluemner, as for Williams, the specificity of the place, Paterson, and the social and political concerns resonant in the phrase “red as poor-man’s flesh” are as important as purely formal artistic issues. Although Bluemner struggled for recognition during his lifetime and was nearly forgotten after his suicide in 1938, a series of important exhibitions and studies in the last quarter century have solidly established the importance of his contributions to American modernism.² His obsessive interest in the



Oscar Bluemner, *Jersey Silk Mills*,
ca. 1916. Watercolor with ink, 7 $\frac{5}{8}$
x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Vera Bluemner Kouba
Collection, Stetson University,
DeLand, Florida



1 Alfred Stieglitz, *Oscar Bluemner*, 1913. Platinum print, 10 1/8 x 8 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Joseph Erdelac, 1978

expressive and spiritual power of color, especially the color red, has received considerable attention from critics. But the importance of his choice of sites for his works has been largely ignored.

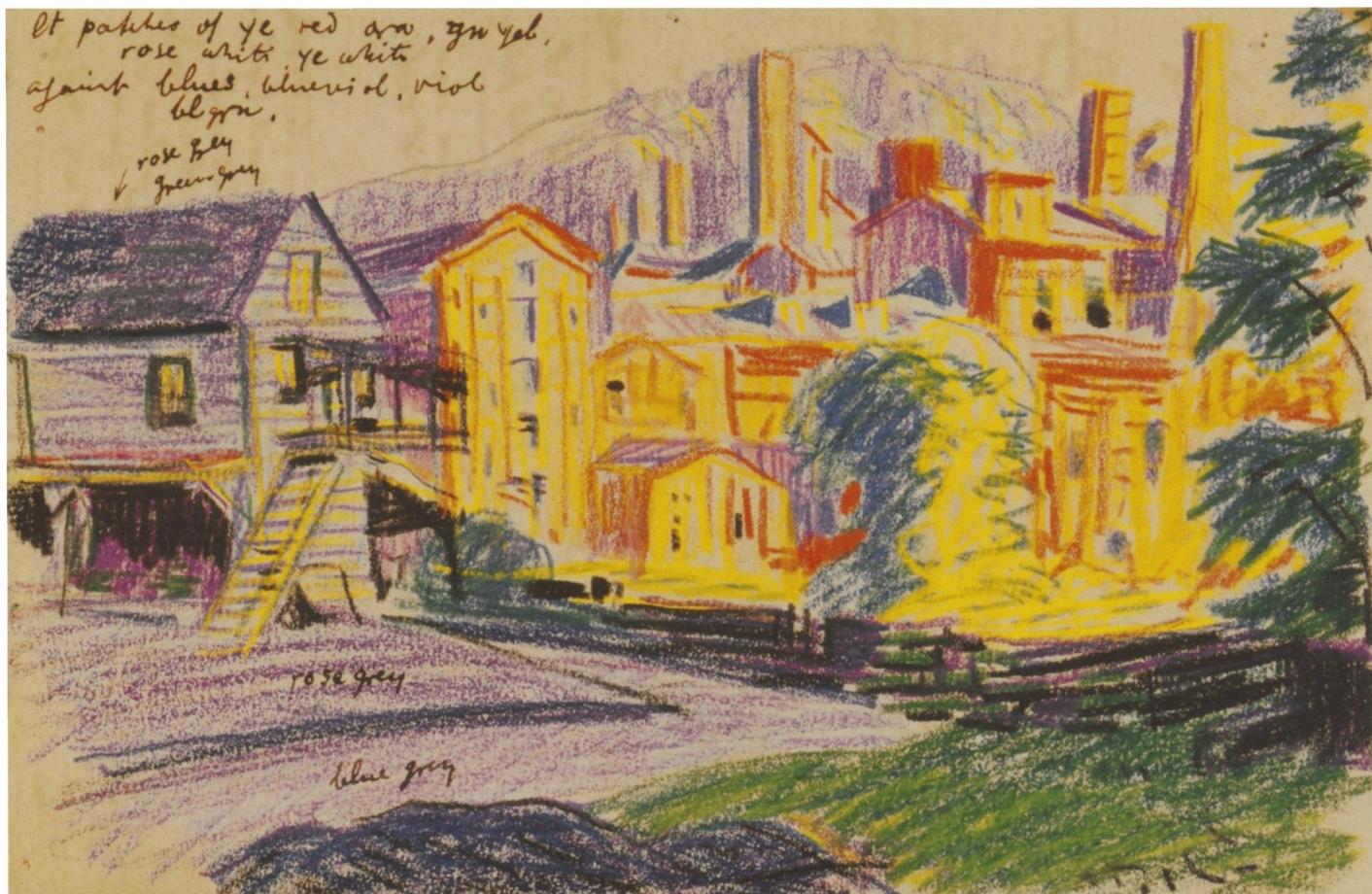
A close study of Bluemner's art—particularly *Jersey Silk Mills*—reveals the significance of place. Even his trademark color took on a political dimension when he painted the town popularly called "the Red City." In an evolving and often contradictory politics of color, Bluemner's red factories could evoke the preferred color of the radical labor movement, influenced by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or the red-blooded

hue of the American flag. These early views of Paterson raised issues that continued to resonate throughout the artist's career, both in the reception of his work and in his ideas about both American art and American identity. He empathized with Paterson and its many immigrant workers for profound personal reasons. He had come to America from Germany in 1892. As a child, he had studied in Elberfeld, a major textile center. As late as 1932 he returned to painting New Jersey textile mills, demonstrating the personal significance the theme retained as an embodiment of his own experience as an immigrant. In his late painting, *Triad Brilliant*, Bluemner explored the power of color to transcend, in a manner analogous to music, not only politics and national identity but also poverty and hardship.

Commitment to Modernist Aesthetics

Around 1911 Bluemner sketched his first study (fig. 2) of the motif portrayed in *Jersey Silk Mills*, one of hundreds of drawings in colored pencil he made in the semirural, semi-industrialized regions within an easy streetcar ride of New York City, where he lived. He was already in his mid-forties, but was just beginning his career as a painter. During his school years in the textile regions of his native Germany, he had developed a habit of sketching incessantly from nature. He earned an architecture degree in Berlin and had worked as an architect in both Chicago and New York, but his hopes for greater freedom of architectural expression in his new country, like the hopes of Paterson's weavers for better conditions, had gone largely unrealized.

In an article written for *Camera Work* in 1914, Bluemner proclaimed that stumbling upon Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession Gallery (known as 291) some time between 1908 and 1910



2 Oscar Bluemner, *Paterson Mills*, ca. 1911. Colored pencil, 4 3/4 x 7 1/4 in. Vera Bluemner Kouba Collection, Stetson University, DeLand, Florida

had transformed his life. There he encountered postimpressionist and European modernist work. "On that day," he declared, "it dawned upon me that there was still hope."³ Under Stieglitz's influence, bolstered by his own extensive study of modernist theory, he began to shift from architecture to painting, and sketches such as this one of silkmills became the testing ground for his transformation into a modernist painter.

By the end of 1911, Bluemner had decisively committed himself to painting and had completed fifteen oils, including the original oil version of *Jersey Silkmills* (fig. 3). He would later drastically revise this work, along with all but one of these first oil paintings. The only work from this group that survives in its early form, *Old Barn at Sheepshead Bay* (1911) probably gives an idea of the style of *Jersey*

Silkmills before it was scraped down and repainted in 1916–17. The painting is similar in execution to the myriad color sketches of this period: dots and dashes of pure tones are set off against white strokes, approximating the effect of the colored pencil drawings in which the white page always provides the dominant tone. The drawings and notes in Bluemner's "Painting Diary" reveal that he had settled on the colors, composition, and basic effect of the 1911 oil paintings in the first colored-pencil study, which is loosely composed and displays a great variety of colors, but emphasizes most strongly a play of oranges and yellows against blue and violet.⁴

A nine-month sojourn in Europe in 1912 would complete Bluemner's makeover from architect to painter and confirm his commitment to modernism.

- 3 Oscar Bluemner, *Jersey Silkmills*, 1911, scraped down and repainted 1916–17. Oil, 20 x 30 in. Private collection



The European tour deepened his awareness of major emerging art movements, including cubism, futurism, and various strands of German expressionism. Back in the United States the next year in time for the landmark opening of the International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show, Bluemner displayed five works and also wrote an extensive and thoughtful review of the entire exhibition for *Camera Work*.

He fine-tuned his pictorial method in a series of eight new oil paintings in 1914–15. A new view of Paterson, called *Paterson Centre* (fig. 4), stood out among a group of more rural subjects. Art historian Jeffrey Hayes describes *Paterson Centre* as “hard-angled, oppositional, inorganic, and dominated by a ‘red . . . form of human handwriting.’” He concludes that it was Bluemner’s direct response to the plight of the city and its immigrant workers in the midst of the labor disputes of 1913. The new series formed the core of Bluemner’s first American solo exhibition, held in 1915 at Stieglitz’s gallery, where a charcoal drawing (fig. 5) of the earlier view of

Silkmills was also on exhibit.⁵ The eight new paintings were an altogether more consistent and confident group than the 1911 oils.

When one of the versions of *Silkmills* (since the medium is not specified, it is difficult to say which version) and *Paterson Centre* were included in the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters in 1916, the latter was retitled *Expression of a Silktown*. The painting shows a view looking up the Passaic River toward the center of the town and depicts various types of buildings, including the domed City Hall, along with vivid red brick factories. Just as Bluemner was completing these eight new paintings, he seemed to have decided to rework the earlier group of oils in a more abstract mode. The powerful planes and decisive shapes and colors he achieved with *Paterson Centre* influenced the choices he made in reworking *Silkmills*. In an unusual and striking watercolor variant (fig. 6), he enlarged a fragment from the upper left portion of *Paterson Centre*. The watercolor compresses the oil’s three strong architectural motifs: the City Hall dome, the central



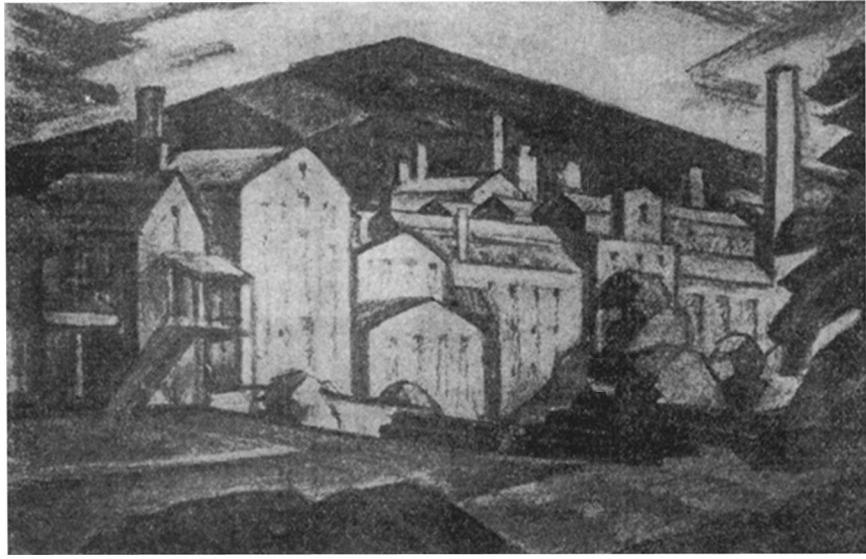
4 Oscar Bluemner, *Paterson Centre (Expression of a Siltown)*, 1914–15. Oil, 30 ¼ x 40 in. New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Marin Jr. and Museum purchase

smokestacks and rooftops, and a fragment of the wall and roof of the building on the far right. The rigorous gridded structure and the radical abstraction of this work signal the new direction that Bluemner would pursue.

The modernism of the paintings Bluemner had completed in 1911 seemed tentative and unresolved by 1915. Seeking to assimilate the exciting developments in modern art he encountered in Europe and at the Armory Show, he became dissatisfied with his earliest oil paintings, and, as he says in his diary, "scratched them all down . . . soap-washed them, and made new charcoal and color studies in order

to make a . . . bigger and simpler impression (partly, where possible, recomposed)."⁶

Perhaps Bluemner first saw the potential for applying his new expressive language to the older works when he realized that the motif of *Jersey Silk Mills*, when distilled and strengthened, could offer a perfect icon for the political and social forces that had so recently come to a boil in Paterson. With the charcoal drawing exhibited at 291, he began intensifying the image's geometric components and dramatic contrasts, a process that he would eventually apply to all of the scraped-down 1911 oils. By rendering the background mountain in the



5 Drawing by Oscar Bluemner, Exhibited at "291" (Photo-Secession Gallery), illustration from the *New York Sun* (November 14, 1915); original drawing 15 x 20 in. Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

drawing as a sharply centralized pyramid whose angles echo the gables of the buildings, he created a bold new confrontation of "Mountain and Mills" (the title the artist sometimes used for this motif in his "Painting Diary"). The logo-like rendering underscores the specificity of the subject since Garrett Mountain was a well-known Paterson landmark.⁷

The later watercolor of *Jersey Silkmills* (see frontispiece), the definitive restatement of the theme, which immediately preceded the overworking of the oil painting of the same subject, combines striking and mathematical clarity of composition with pulsating and jewel-like color. Sharply flattened planes replace the color modeling of the 1911 sketch (see fig. 2). Except for the stable in the left foreground, the buildings are now rendered with two tones of red and are accentuated by contrasting blue-green roofs. Bluemner adds red chimneys on the left so that a uniform rhythm of red verticals is repeated across the whole width of the painting, and he puts plumes of smoke atop each chimney to enhance the overall pictorial unity. These smoke streamers are composed of comalike curves that mirror the simplified shapes of the foliage in the foreground, and precise horizontal lines become part

of an underlying grid that now knits together the entire composition. This lucid balance reflects the exactitude that Bluemner's training and practice as an architect fostered. The glowing combination of spiritualism and sensuality conveyed in the color reflects his own highly individualized response to early modernist theory.⁸

The 1916–17 oil version (see fig. 3) essentially recapitulates the watercolor, although, as is often the case in Bluemner's early works, a certain flatness of tone in the oil replaces the fresh glow of the watercolor. In both versions, Bluemner's expressive new artistic language dramatically heightens the impact of the controversial content, the beleaguered "Red City" of Paterson.

"The Intimate Landscape of Our Common Surroundings"

Bluemner's "Painting Diary" includes over fifty pages of text, six drawings, and various diagrams devoted to analyzing every stage of the creation of the 1911 painting of *Jersey Silkmills* and its transformation in 1916–17. The diary was primarily a format for working out the formal and expressive elements of his paintings. Bluemner also makes clear that he prefers a particular kind of intermediate landscape, neither wild nor urban, which might include both factories and mountains, as in *Jersey Silkmills*. He describes the characteristics of this landscape, to which he remained loyal throughout his career, in a passage written toward the end of his life: "I prefer the intimate landscape of our common surroundings, where town and country mingle. For, we are in the habit to carry into them our feelings of pain and pleasure, our moods, in fact Nature with her own color combinations causes our soul to vibrate and furnishes themes."⁹

While other members of the Stieglitz circle expressed modernity through the



6 Oscar Bluemner, *Paterson*, 1914. Watercolor, 15 x 20 in. Vera Bluemner Kouba Collection, Stetson University, DeLand, Florida

dramatic representation of the urban sublime evoked in the vertical city of soaring skyscrapers and, in later years, tended to turn to remote and dramatic wilderness themes, Bluemner preferred less overtly dramatic fare throughout his life. His favorite subjects are weed-choked and half-industrialized river-banks, unpromising manufacturing suburbs, and that indeterminate region between city and country where small factories and farms elbow one another. Significantly, the passage that epitomizes this distinctive landscape appears in the artist's comments on the 1911 version of *Silkmills*. He declares that the essence of modernity is found in the following:

*the things and scenes most closely interwoven with the progress of life, [rather] than . . . those which belong only to a separated, idle class of rich people. Hence the portions of towns and villages where the laboring people exist, where original nature mingles with the most typical and essential work of man in "improving" the earth for housing and crops, or moving goods by water or rail.*¹⁰

This observation comes at the end of an elaborate discussion of the role of color in art. Here the artist embraces not only the aesthetic and spiritual role of color but also its social implications:

*The general task is to see color wherever life or nature is and rather nearest to us and linked to all our interests, and sympathies than in exotic regions or eccentric effects; accordingly we today have a different idea of color in connection with things from those before with the same things. . . . To clearly and masterfully show new original color beauty as a result of our own general ideas of color, on the things around us, is the problem of the modern colorist and it is now more nearly related to musical art, than ever before. Color now is not a phenomenon of light or atmosphere or of a societies [sic] state of mind (power, historical subjects, vanity, religion, etc.) but individual relation to modern mans [sic] culture, and aspirations, the result of all achievements of modern life, especially in science, technique, literature and . . . music.*¹¹

The social, cultural, and aesthetic concerns expressed here remained paramount to the painter throughout his career, and it is not surprising that he invests the most intense expression of those ideas in the motif of the Paterson silk factories.

When Bluemner was addressing Paterson's mills as a subject between 1911 and 1917, it is unlikely that anyone viewed his work as politically neutral. The New York critics who chose different versions of Jersey silkmills to illustrate reviews of Bluemner's 1915 and 1918 exhibitions would have known Paterson's factories as hotbeds of immigrant worker unrest, often violent labor disputes, and a cause célèbre of radical political factions. If they ignored the news reports that chronicled the labor clashes erupting across the Hudson, they could not have missed the Paterson Strike Pageant, when these issues crossed the river to enter Manhattan.¹²

We can find numerous hints in contemporary comments on Bluemner's painting that, whatever the artist's own intention, the critics sensed, and were made uneasy by, the political implications of his work. These suspicions are most blatant in the writings of art critic Henry McBride. In his review of the 291 show (illustrated by the silkmills drawing [see fig. 5]), McBride declares, "Mr. Bluemner has put more bright vermilion into his New Jersey landscapes than any other color." He goes on to state, "Mr. Bluemner has also noticed . . . that there are many factories and tall chimneys composed entirely of straight lines in that country. These he renders in a spirit of hate. One wonders why? New Yorkers as a rule survey these factories with great complacency. Are they not safely in New Jersey?" In later years, McBride compliments Bluemner on what he sees as a distancing from early political messages. In 1924, in a review of an exhibition of watercolors at the Neumann Print Gallery, he comments: "He used to live in New Jersey, in Newark, Paterson, or some such place, and saw many factories. Factories fastened upon his ego. He saw them red. His paintings of factory scenes were the most violent protests against the modern system that I have ever encountered. But the propagandist in them got the better of the poet."¹³

And again, in a 1926 review of works at the Handwork Center, McBride said: "He has been through a phase of something like Socialism, in which he went forth to slay wrongs with his art. He painted factory buildings at that time in staring reds that no doubt contained a threat to us who are not particularly interested in factories." Another critic who wrote, in 1918, that in Bluemner's work "[t]he manufacturing center of Paterson flames like a torch against the luminous background," was less obvious in ascribing political motives. Nevertheless, this veiled unease may account for the artist's lifelong difficulties in finding a supportive

audience for work that seemed to address issues that many preferred to keep "safely in New Jersey."¹⁴

A Tale of Two Silk Cities: Elberfeld and Paterson

The textile factories of New Jersey had special appeal for Bluemner because they called to mind childhood memories of his years of schooling in Elberfeld in northwestern Germany. Elberfeld was the subject of some of his earliest artworks (fig. 7). The ancient town on the bank of the Wupper River had been a center of the textile industry since the Renaissance. The introduction of silk weaving and red dyeing in the late eighteenth century greatly enhanced its importance. The artist later remembered: "The magnificent color to the prevailing silk industries there, made possible by . . . new German tar dyes, made an indelible impression which compensated for the perpetual gray rainy sky. . . . The luminously colored stained glass windows of the old churches . . . added to this."¹⁵

The work force of Paterson represented several well-known textile centers in Europe, including Elberfeld. While Oscar Bluemner followed both his father and grandfather in pursuing an architectural career, his brother Karl preferred a position in the textile business. The artist may well have had acquaintances from Elberfeld in the German community of Paterson. During his 1912 European trip, he revisited the town and exhibited twenty-seven works at the Städtliches Museum there.¹⁶

Gray sky and the gloomy buildings of a late-nineteenth century factory town shrouded the "magnificent colors" of the silks and the "glowing stained glass" that Bluemner remembered from Elberfeld. Through his brother, the artist would have learned to appreciate the rich patterned fabrics like the jacquard silks produced in the mills of Paterson. In



7 Oscar Bluemner, *Die Beienburg bei Elberfeld*, 1885. Watercolor, 6 7/8 x 10 1/8 in. Vera Bluemner Kouba Collection, Stetson University, DeLand, Florida

one of his notebooks, he later expressed admiration for Chinese silk-embroidered paintings he saw in a restaurant: "kept together and made brilliant by the white ground, a pictorial unity, hence real paintings (why cannot silk thread, instead of pigment and board, be the medium!) The like in beautiful color and powerful expression of serene joy I have never seen."

When he rendered the silk factories of New Jersey, he imparted the rich iridescence of their products (and also something of the spiritual intensity of stained glass) to the buildings themselves. He had subtitled his second major painting of Paterson *Expression of a Silk Town*; his comments on the motif refer to "silk colors," "silk folds," "silk hangings," and the way that the upright masses of the buildings create "vertical creases," as in fabric. The references to fabric continued when he returned to rework *Jersey Silkmills* in 1916; his notes frequently speak of "interweaving" both forms and colors. In a leap of imagination typical of his mental cross-indexing of ideas and influences, he describes the effect of the factories in his newly enhanced color scheme as similar to "the brilliant red and rose draperies of Fra Angelico."¹⁷

The artist's notes on the evolution of the painting *Jersey Silkmills* make it clear

that he recognized both the grubby and unpromising nature of the motifs and the transforming possibilities of color:

*This scene in Paterson with crude brick factories, a very dull foreground, ugly heaps of timbers and all misplaced at the foot of an inviting hill would be utterly uninteresting, artistically, on a photograph [sic], probably on a pen drawing or nearly monochrome or grey-colored picture. The details by which the ugly foreground of ashes, weeds, stables, the hot, ugly factories of monotonous brick-work, regular windows, tanks, chimneys, skylights are specialized as such, are of interest or beauty to no one. Hence it would be a mistake to make these the object of the brush. The scene, however, as it was illuminated, exhibited intense beauty of color, brilliant white, pale blue, blue green, purples, and a range of brilliant yellow and orange lights: that is both contrast of tone and harmonious contrasts of color with the specific character of the scene i.e. its arrangement of nature and buildings divided in a novel combination of line and mass. Moreover, the color-effect is peculiar, unusual: brilliant yellow and orange light, strong reds with perfect blacks in the pale cool blue foreground, amidst the green of foliage. These colors are peculiar and integral to this scene, in this light. Hence a motif of uncommon interest. And only these colors are to be given and significant. Color requires the suppression of or at least subordination of everything else, and the pre-eminence of the brush stroke; it creates and appears by the qualities inherent only to color—beauty and paint.*¹⁸

The richness and variety of color emphasized in this description and still evident in the sketches and notes of 1911 gives way to the overwhelming dominance of red in the final watercolor and oil versions of *Jersey Silkmills* of 1916–17 (see frontispiece and fig. 3). The complementary greens of the surrounding foliage intensify the prominent red notes of the brick factories, underscoring the play of the angular man-made structures against

the curving lines of the trees. The red buildings of *Jersey Silk Mills* present one of the most dramatic displays of the characteristic color note that would earn Bluemner the title "the Vermillionaire." Explanations for Bluemner's "red obsession" range from his own complex excursions into the aesthetic, spiritual, and scientific regions of artistic and philosophic color theory to the popular anecdote that the cash-strapped artist was simply taking advantage of a windfall of a large supply of cheap red paint. In his writings, red is identified with blood, masculinity, imagination, the self, and even love and religious ecstasy. It is clear from the reviews cited, however, that audiences would have seen political implications in Bluemner's color choice, and they would have known that those implications were particularly apt for a rendering of Paterson.

The Strike and the Pageant

That the Paterson Strike and Pageant occurred the same year as the Armory Show reveals the deep entanglement of artistic and political radicalism in the period before World War I.¹⁹ Although Bluemner does not spell out his political views in his diary with the exhaustive attention that he devotes to artistic theory, it is clear from the earliest studies of *Silk Mills* that he was also concerned with the social and political dimensions of its subject. The combination of local observation and international theoretical and artistic concerns that he brought to bear as he revised his painting mirrors the complex mix of forces that was focused on Paterson in 1913.

America's first secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, founded Paterson on the Great Falls of the Passaic River in 1791. He envisioned it as an important federal manufacturing center, supplying the needs of the new nation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the town was the scene of repeated labor uprisings, as well as home to immigrant

Anti-Political Actionists Take Notice



*Drawn by John Sloan
WHEN KICKED OUT OF CAPITALIST PATERSON, N. J., A SOCIALIST HALEDON, N. J., HAS PROVED NOT ONLY CONVENIENT BUT NECESSARY.*

Another Case of Ingratitude

John Reed

anarchists and revolutionaries. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of the IWW labor organizers who helped coordinate the 1913 strike, noted that even before the wave of strikes and violence that culminated in the pageant, Paterson had been known as "the Red City." Its history of notorious labor unrest began as early as 1828 with a strike of women and children.²⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century, silk manufacture was Paterson's leading industry. The "Silk City," as it was also called, dominated every aspect of silk production in this country, and the need for skilled workers brought a steady stream of immigrants. As mechanization of the industry increased, however, the owners' plans to reduce the number of workers inevitably caused conflict. The 1913 strike, one of the most famous in American labor history, lasted five months and eventually involved almost twenty-five thousand workers at nearly three hundred mills.

The strike began in January as the latest of a series of actions against Henry Doherty, whose newest mill was designed to increase production by requiring weavers to operate four looms instead



- 8 John Sloan, *When Kicked out of Capitalist Paterson*, illustration from *The Masses*, July 1913. Tamiment Library Collection, New York University
- 9 Strikers marching up Fifth Avenue on their way to the Paterson Pageant, 1913

of two. By February, fearing that resulting unemployment throughout the industry would lower wages, broad-silk weavers, ribbon weavers, and the unskilled and ill-paid dyers banded together to create an industry-wide strike. Their rallying cry centered on all three divisions' desire for an eight-hour day and increased wages for all silk workers. The strikers soon called in the organizational skills of IWW leaders including "Big Bill" Haywood, Carlo Tresca, Patrick Quinlan, and Gurley Flynn.

The strike precipitated a three-pronged political alliance: the striking silk workers, the IWW organizers, and a group of Greenwich Village artists and intellectuals. The IWW brought an international perspective and a vision of America as a place where the working class of the world could come together. New York writers and artists took up the workers' cause, arranging to house strikers' children, and giving sympathetic ear to reports of the struggles in Paterson. John Reed, writer for the left-wing journal *The Masses*, was arrested while helping picketers. He soon became the most

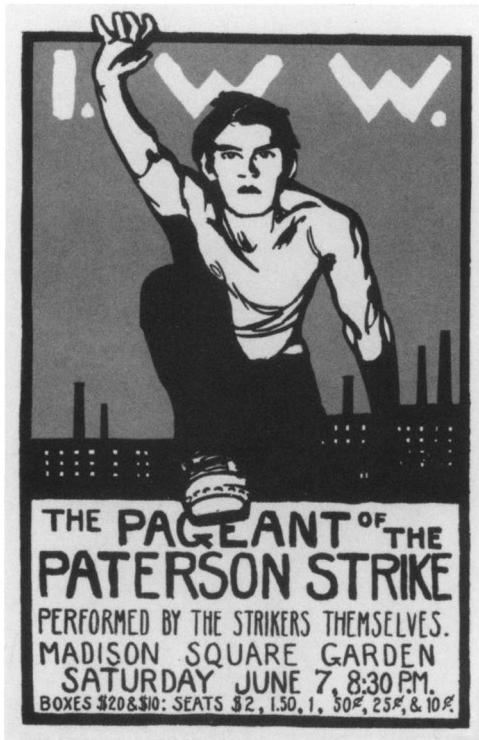
eloquent spokesman for the strike in the intellectual circles in New York. Reed would later become famous for his eyewitness account of the Russian Revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World*.²¹

When striking workers were forbidden to assemble in the meeting halls of Paterson, the Socialist mayor of the "streetcar suburb" of Haledon invited them to gather there instead (fig. 8). Pietro Botto offered his house as a rallying point for strikers and organizers. Historian Steve Golin notes, "High on a hill overlooking a large green, which was almost enclosed by a semicircle of woods, the second-story balcony of the Botto House provided the speakers (in Flynn's words) with 'a natural platform and amphitheatre.'" Soon the organizers and strikers were holding regular Sunday rallies in front of the Botto House, across the river from the scene of factories and Garrett Mountain recorded in *Jersey Silk Mills*. In Haledon, New York intellectuals saw the working class at its most hopeful and most united.

As the strike progressed, silk workers were having difficulty feeding their families, much less paying the rent. The idea of creating a theatrical production to dramatize the plight of the striking workers and to raise funds to help their families was hatched in an unlikely setting, the Greenwich Village "salon" of socialite and Armory Show supporter Mabel Dodge. Dodge herself claimed to have suggested the idea to an audience including Haywood and Reed. Reed became the director of the pageant and recruited college friends and fellow writers from *The Masses* to assist in various ways. The resulting pageant has been described as "an important incident in the history of radical self-consciousness and in the history of public art in this country."²³

On June 7, fifteen hundred workers were transported across the Hudson by train and ferry to New York City, where they marched up Fifth Avenue in a sea of red (fig. 9): red IWW banners, red

10 Robert Edmund Jones, program cover for *The Pageant of the Paterson Silk Strike*, June 7, 1913. American Labor Museum, Haledon, New Jersey



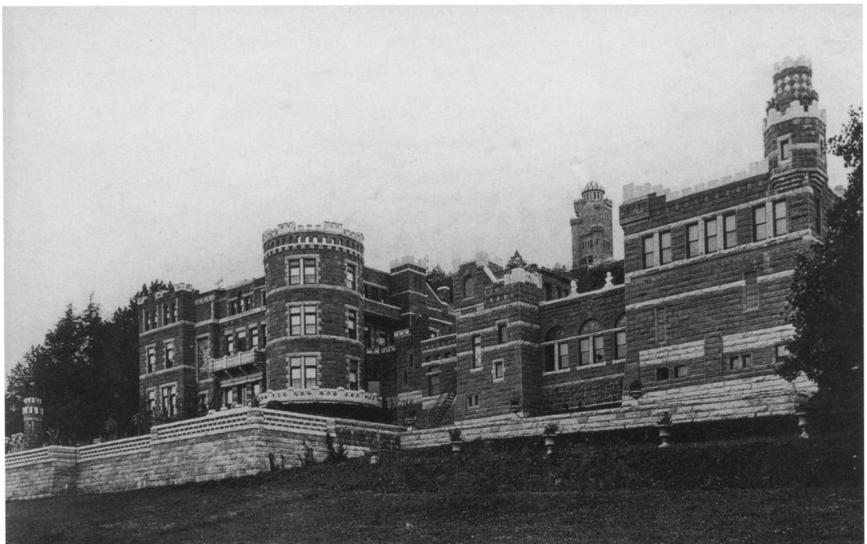
songbooks, red ribbons, red carnations for the ladies, even red union cards. The participants entered Madison Square Garden past blazing red electric signs. Factory buildings, as intensely red as those in Bluemner's paintings, featured prominently in the visual accoutrements of the pageant.

Reed enlisted a Harvard friend, Robert Edmond Jones, to plan the production logistics and to create the poster design that was also used for the program cover (fig. 10). A muscular worker lunges forward beneath the IWW logo. The versions printed in color feature darkened factory buildings silhouetted against a bright red background. John Sloan, a major artistic contributor to *The Masses*, created the enormous two-hundred-foot-long stage backdrop presenting an expanded view of fiercely red factories (fig. 11). Wings with views of smaller mills flanked the central image of a giant silkmill. The stage directions for the first act ("The Mills Alive—The Workers Dead") describe the "mill windows all aglow," suggesting that the backdrop was dramatically lighted

from behind. At the signal, the workers streamed out of the factory singing the "Marseillaise," and the audience was invited to sing along as the mock strike began.²⁴

Accounts of the pageant stressed the drama of the scene and the impression made by the theatrical drop of the Paterson factory, "windows aglow with the artificial light in which the workers begin their daily tasks." This detail of glowing windows, stressed in the *Herald Tribune* account of the pageant, resembles an effect especially evident in Bluemner's watercolor version of *Jersey Silkmills* (see frontispiece) where each factory window is touched with luminous yellow. Perhaps the resemblance is more than coincidental, since the artist took a great interest in theatrical staging and, even if he did not actually attend the pageant, may well have been intrigued by descriptions of it. He typically compared his pictorial settings to stages upon which buildings and trees stood in for human actors. Later in his career, critic Emily Genauer would comment, "His pictures . . . resemble dramatically lighted stage sets," and would compare them to theater settings by strike pageant designer Robert Edmond Jones.²⁵

The site in Paterson that Bluemner chose for *Jersey Silkmills* stands almost precisely at the intersection of the social and political forces that shaped the city's turbulent history. The group of mill buildings stood near the Passaic River, alongside one of the raceways or canals drawing on the power generated by the Great Falls. Garrett Mountain rises sharply behind the factory buildings. The intense color play of green mountain and red factories, so strongly accentuated by the compositional reworking of the later versions of the subject, underscores other contrasts. In the late 1890s Catholina Lambert, one of the wealthiest mill owners, constructed Belle Vista Castle at the apex of Garrett



11 *Paterson Pageant, Madison Square Garden*, 1913. Photograph. Tamiment Library Collection, New York University

12 *Belle Vista Castle, Paterson, New Jersey*, ca. 1896. Photograph. Passaic County Historical Society, Paterson, New Jersey

Mountain, about a mile and a half south of these factories (fig. 12). From this opulent, turreted establishment, members of the family could look down on the Great Falls and on the mills, sources of the wealth that allowed them to entertain lavishly and to build an extensive art collection. Lambert was a founder and vigorous supporter of the Silk Association of America and the Paterson Board of Trade, organizations that passionately and intransigently opposed the striking forces in 1913. The silk strikes would eventually undermine the Lamberts'

wealth and position; by 1916 they were forced to auction their art collection, and a few years later they sold the entire estate to the city of Paterson. The once baronial estate became a public park, the trees and fields of Garrett Mountain Reservation. William Carlos Williams described it as "the Park upon the rock, female to the city."²⁶

Botto House was almost equidistant from the mill site in the opposite direction from Lambert's mansion, across the river in the town of Haledon. John Sloan's cartoon for *The Masses* (see fig. 8) sharpens the confrontation between the speech-making in Haledon and the factories of Paterson, leaving out Botto House itself (which would be behind the speaker), the river that separated Haledon from Paterson, and the mountain that backed the factories on the far side of the river. According to the director of Botto House (now transformed into the American Labor Museum), the open area in front of the house gave the speakers a vista that embraced the mills and Garrett Mountain, perhaps a more distant version of the very motif Bluemner selected for his painting.²⁷

Despite the successful publicity generated by the Paterson pageant, little profit resulted. The conditions of the workers continued to deteriorate, even with increased relief funds from New York, and the mill owners refused to compromise. The strikers finally succumbed to hunger and returned to work, many under the old conditions, but the silk industry and the town of Paterson never recovered. When Bluemner began to revise *Jersey Silk Mills* in 1915, the brief optimism of 1913 was shattered, and the mills themselves were doomed.

Red Blood and Red Brick

In Bluemner's extensive notebooks his sympathies for the working classes are repeatedly in evidence. Among the Bluemner papers in the Archives of American

Art is a flyer by socialist Norman Thomas (fig. 13) in which the artist heavily underlined the following passage, found under the subtitle "Socialists and 'Reds'": "The toilers, the oppressed—among others the early Christians—have been proud to take red as their color because it is the color of red blood of men which gives vigor and hope to humanity's progress." In the margin beside this passage, Bluemner marked an enormous exclamation point.²⁸

For Bluemner, the red brick factories of America provided a color scheme that could be used both to express his sympathies for the workers who toiled there and to underscore what he perceived as the distinctively American quality of red brick. On a visit to Reading, Pennsylvania, in the early 1930s, the artist was asked to write an article for the local paper. He extolled the "red charms of Reading" and declared:

Red brick is an industrial symbol. I came to Reading for the first time a few years ago, and was at once thrilled by the prevailing

color—red—of the majority of its walls and roofs. A courageous, lusty, undiluted all-over red—a positive assertion.

Color, like music and poetry, always springs from the people. Artists give the shape. Professors paste tags on the creations. Green is leaf and grass, from which the cow and our spinach eaters suck contentment. Black and indigo distinguish the snob. Red, however, is blood, vitality, majesty, love, religious ecstasy.

The earth happens to give us cheap and excellent paints, which, with their mildly subdued reds, give character to farm and home, to the houses of the broad masses of our Americans. Their healthy vigor and solidity of mind speaks through that red—always, nature, custom and the useful blend with the deeper human instincts. Real art is local.

When I came many years ago to America I was at once astonished by the lusty, vital, youthful red of brick and wood everywhere—more energetic than similar color abroad. . . .

Go red, young man and young girl! Love your city! . . . Red is modern and supreme life.²⁹

What Socialism Is and Is Not

By NORMAN THOMAS
(Socialist Candidate for President, 1932)

In a world where Socialism is so great a force, lots of people who ought to know what Socialism is are all mixed up. A great many insist on confusing Socialists and Communists, while some find it fashionable to announce that Socialists are only social reformers.

Socialism, because it is a big and living thing, allows room for some differences of opinion within its ranks, but it is just as impossible for a man to be at the same time a Bolshevik-Socialist-Anarchist as it would be to be a Buddhist-Christian-Agnostic. Basically Socialists are characterized by these things:

What We Believe

1. We believe that the development of a machine age has brought us to a place where our only escape from disaster lies in the social ownership and management for use, not profit, of things necessary for the common life; that is to say, land, natural resources, and the principal means of production and distribution.

2. Socialists are internationalists. That doesn't mean that we do not love our own nation and want to make it more truly a nation worthy to be loved. It means that in an interdependent world where you can't even eat a decent breakfast without dependence on food from far distant lands, the workers must cooperate in large economic policies. It means that we teach a solidarity of workers across racial and national lines as the only hope for peace and happiness among men.

3. Socialists are believers in democracy. We are not democrats at the price of Socialism but we believe that at least in a country like America, with our democratic tradition, we must depend on a genuine democracy of the workers, and not on any dictatorship. To believe in democracy does not mean that we do not affirm the fact of a basic conflict in interest between a small owning class and the mass of workers. This is the class struggle which we hope to end by establishing the classless society of Socialism. But democracy in our country, better than any dictatorship, we think, will serve the interest of the great mass of workers, who are the mass of people, as against the interest of some one group of them.

Perhaps the best way I can make these statements clear is to repeat some questions that I am continually asked and give my answers to them.

Socialists and "Reds"

1. ARE YOU SOCIALISTS "REDS" AND REVOLUTIONISTS? We are, but not in the bogeyman's sense that a lot of folks have been taught to understand. The toilers, the oppressed—among others the early

Christians—have been proud to take red as their color because it is the color of red blood of men which gives vigor and hope to humanity's progress. We are revolutionists in the sense that we seek no patched up old system but a genuinely and fundamentally changed system.

We believe with Lincoln that a nation like America which had its origin in a revolution has never lost the revolutionary right to change its institutions for the common good. But with all our heart and soul and mind and strength we Socialists work for what would be the greatest and the newest thing in the world, a peaceful revolution—one not without struggle, but without that wholesale mass violence which in this age of economic complexity and the destructiveness of poison gas would prove so incredibly deadly.

It is the few who seek violence, but the stubborn Bourbons, the reactionaries, the class which keeps Mooney and Billings in jail and makes the coal camps of West Virginia and Kentucky veritable Hells, the men who deny civil liberty and refuse adequate relief to the unemployed, the men who cling to power and profit at no matter what cost to mankind, the jingoes, the militarists, who can always find money for armament though the people are homeless and starving—these are the bringers of violence. So long as it is possible we shall seek to use the organized power of the workers industrially and politically as the means of peaceful revolution. And in this we invite the help of men and women of good will.

For Relief Now

2. ARE YOU SOCIALISTS ONLY SOCIAL REFORMERS? IF NOT, WHY DO YOU BOTHER WITH IMMEDIATE DEMANDS, SUCH AS YOUR AGITATION FOR UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF? We are not mere social reformers. We are convinced that the world needs a new purpose and a new philosophy, and that the more widely this revolutionary new philosophy is held the faster will be our progress.

We believe that Socialism can be achieved in our time.

We do not believe that in the light of the experience of mankind, including the Russian experience, that it can be achieved at one full swoop. We do not believe that it is the most oppressed workers who have the desire or the strength for constructive change. Starved children are not the best builders of the Cooperative Commonwealth. We must show workers who are awaking out of apathy that we care for them now, that we have something to offer now, and that without losing sight of our goal we can march toward it from victory to victory, each time gaining something more.³⁰ We do believe, though, that it is not possible to CURE unemployment until we achieve complete Socialism.

We believe that it is possible to relieve unemployment and help the workers forward toward the Socialist goal by the practical program we have drawn up. We believe that international Socialism is the only guarantee of permanent peace, but we believe that by the program of international relations which we present we can prevent particular wars while we seek to change the capitalist-nationalist system which is the breeder of war.

13. *What Socialism Is and Is Not*, 1932. Pamphlet for presidential campaign of Norman Thomas, with annotations by Oscar Bluemner. Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

During and after World War I, Bluemner was particularly concerned about the Americanness of red brick factories and their populist associations. The war brought anti-German sentiment and intense American nationalism and a heightened interest in things “American.” Although he had become a naturalized American citizen in 1899, Bluemner did not escape rising xenophobia, even when he moved from New York to Bloomfield, New Jersey, in 1916. While on a sketching trip in the New Jersey countryside, he and his son Robert were harassed by police and briefly arrested as suspected spies. His neighbors reported to local authorities their suspicion that the various jars and bottles arranged on his windowsill were used to concoct explosives—in fact, they were ingredients for his experimental pigments and varnishes.³⁰

Bluemner’s German birth and education rendered him slightly suspect, even to those who otherwise recognized the originality of his work. When critic Charles Caffin reviewed his first American exhibition, he could not resist associating some qualities of Bluemner’s work with German militarism:

In the scenes in these pictures you cannot imagine human beings moving freely. They would be drilled, regimented, coerced into formations; moving like automatons at the word of command; a command imposed upon them by their subjection to an idea—an idea that represents in the final analysis the autocratic will of a few individuals. It is utterly alien to the American idea of democracy.

The accusations of “foreignness” or “Germanness” are particularly ironic. When Bluemner showed his paintings in Berlin in 1912, a German critic remarked, “Berlin critics looked at them dubiously. One commented that, as the paintings were not European, they must be American.”³¹

Shortly after the artist’s suicide, critic Paul Rosenfeld concluded his generally

sympathetic posthumous tribute to Bluemner with this comment:

In immigrating to America, Bluemner would seem to have exchanged a milieu potentially sympathetic to his . . . temperament and patterns of experience for one less inclined to sympathy with them. His appointed place in all probability was [not here, but] in the ranks of the pre-Nazi German moderns.³²

Anti-German prejudice contributed to Bluemner’s deepening economic crisis. A not-insignificant part of his decision to scrape down and repaint his 1911 oils, including *Silkmills*, was probably that he could not afford to buy new canvases.

Ironically, Bluemner’s connection with Stieglitz, originally cemented by their common background as students at Berlin’s Königliche Technische Hochschule at the end of the nineteenth century, floundered when Bluemner took offense at Stieglitz’s repeated inquiries into his citizenship. The rupture occurred at the end of the 1920s, a time of almost obsessive concern with “Americanness” in the Stieglitz circle. The photographer now called his gallery An American Place, and the artists of the group seemed to be engaged in an unofficial competition to create “The Great American Painting.” Art historian Wanda Corn comments that members of the Stieglitz circle at this time had “appropriated the word ‘American’ and used it to describe their work with such frequency that it appeared that no one else in the cultural realm had rights to it.” By the early 1930s, Bluemner was writing to his fellow German immigrant, J. B. Neumann, “Only birth-certified Americans (100% Hoboken-born with the necessary dollars) can buy salvation from the Supreme Judge . . . Stieglitz.”³³

From Bluemner’s notebooks, we see that his renderings of red factories are, in part, his own entries to the sweepstakes of “great American painting.” The failure of his contemporaries to recognize them as

such may well stem from his ambiguous and even cynical response to notions of American greatness. In many ways his immigration to America was the quintessential American experience, and the silk factories of Paterson, associated in the public mind with immigrants, were the perfect embodiment of that experience in all of its ambiguity. In a 1932 forum in the *New York Times* addressing the question "What is American Art?" Bluemner declared:

*There is, and always was, nothing more ridiculous and, to art, disastrous, than patrioteering, which thinly veils profiteering. Ideally, art, pure, is of a sphere and of no country; the first real artists, always and everywhere, have been either importers or immigrants, bringing the light with them.*³⁴

The Great American Artwork

In the same year that he contemplated the nature of "American art" and the question of the "immigrant artist" in the *Times*, Bluemner returned to the subject of New Jersey textile factories in the painting *Triad Brilliant* (fig. 14), a view of mills along the loop of the Passaic River on the other side of Garrett Mountain. Although he had been living in Massachusetts since the death of his wife in 1926, he reutilized a composition he had first sketched in New Jersey in 1914. The painting was one of a large group that were shown in the last solo exhibition held during the artist's lifetime, a 1935 show at the Marie Harriman Gallery in New York of works described as "Compositions for Color Themes." The paintings were based on sketches of ordinary scenery, which had been, as Hayes notes, "gradually refined in terms of 'pure color' and related to the emotional power of his favorite musical composers: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Liszt, Scriabin, and

Schoenberg." Titles such as *Violet Tones*, *Black by Gold*, and *Situation in Yellow* refer to the ways in which colors establish the emotional key of the paintings. Bluemner's notes on *Triad Brilliant* indicate that he hoped to use "the most audacious liveliness of tone contrast and pure sharp color" to evoke an "extatic [sic] mood." "In such colors," he declares, "the earliest old masters clothed the saints or the musicians worked."³⁵

The "triad" of the title is expressed in the three elements of buildings, tree, and water, but primarily, like the other titles of the series, it refers to the color scheme. The dominant triad of red, white, and blue is intensified by a secondary triad of yellow, violet, and black. Such a pointed use of red, white, and blue indicates that this particular painting does not confine itself to evoking mood through musical color, but also addresses the issue of national identity.

Celeste Connor has noted how frequently the artists of the Stieglitz circle "used the colors of the U.S. flag to tell viewers that [they were] entering the unannounced competition among artists of the time to create 'the great American artwork.'" She convincingly cites examples of this practice in the art of John Marin, Charles Demuth, and Georgia O'Keeffe. O'Keeffe used the device self-consciously and more than a little ironically when she painted *Cow's Skull—Red, White, and Blue* (fig. 15) in 1931. She described the genesis of her tricolor background in an interview: "So as I painted along on my cow's skull on blue I thought to myself, 'I'll make it an American painting. They will not think it great with the red stripes down the sides—Red, White and Blue—but they will notice it.'" Bluemner deliberately mimicked O'Keeffe's *Cow's Skull* in an unusual *Self-Portrait* (fig. 16). He retains the intense frontality of her composition, and flip-flops her tricolor background, concentrating the red in

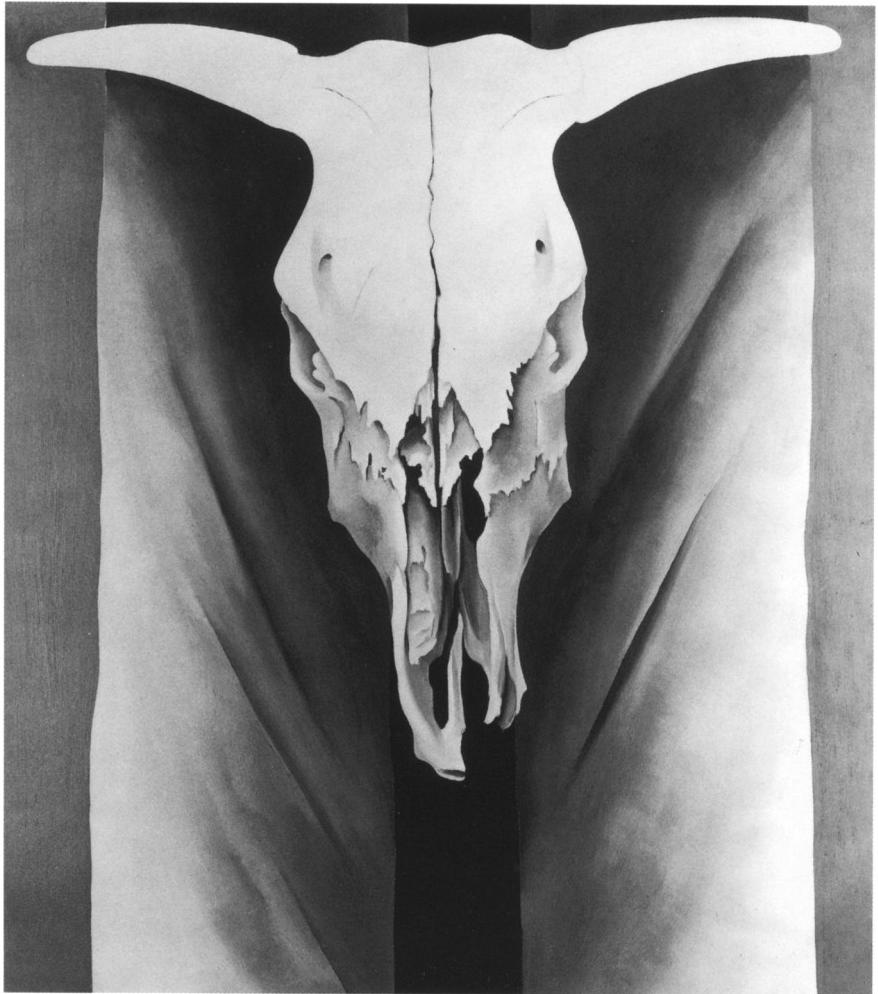


14 Oscar Bluemner, *Triad Brilliant*, 1932. Oil on wood, 22 ½ x 29 ½ in. Collection of Judith and Stanley Katz

the center and moving the blue and white to the edges.³⁶

Painting the scene of textile mills in *Triad Brilliant* in the colors of the flag asserted the value of the motif as characteristically American, but it carried a considerable ironic charge as well. American flags were an important product of the silkmills, and during the 1913 strike the owners tried to appeal to the patriotism of the workers and to urge their rejection of the "foreign" influence. Mill owners designated March 17 as "flag day" and urged the workers to come back to work on that Monday to assert their loyalty to the flag. With flags and

patriotic banners flying all over the city of Paterson, the factory owners waited to welcome back and forgive their erring workers. The Newark *Star* noted: "It was a very successful end of the strike, marred by only one thing—none of the strikers went back." Instead they continued to march in the picket lines, but now wore special cards on their lapels emblazoned with an American flag and the caption: "We wove the flag. We dyed the flag. We won't scab under the flag." When they marched up Fifth Avenue on their way to the strike pageant, they proudly waved the flags that they had manufactured.³⁷



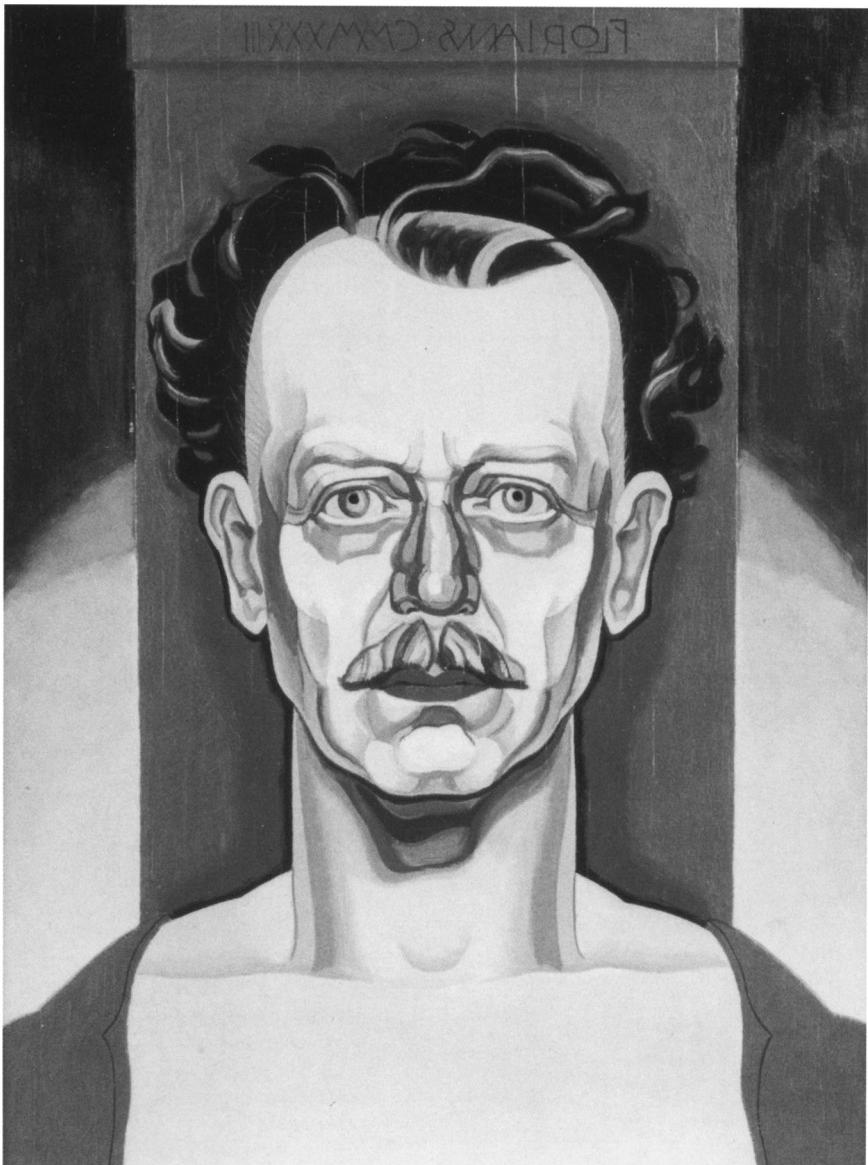
15 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Cow's Skull: Red, White and Blue*, 1931. Oil, 39 7/8 x 35 7/8 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection

16 Oscar Bluemner, *Self-Portrait*, 1933. Oil on wood, 20 x 15 in. Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis

The way that the specifics of local associations and nationalist assertion were intermingled with the poetic and musical meanings of *Triad Brilliant* is apparent in Bluemner's writing. At one point he called the oil *Holiday*, presumably meaning to suggest the power of music, or the human spirit, or both, to transcend the harsh realities of the "hard factory wall." The concluding statement in his notes is highly ambiguous: "I care nothing what anybody says. The man in the street is imprisoned in factory walls. On a bright holiday we are lonely and nowhere. The blue sky is church, red blood cannot rise above it. Hard and brilliant is the beauty of this age.—It is, however, a scene, not a vision."³⁸

The insistence that *Triad Brilliant* represents "a scene, not a vision" means that Bluemner brought to the painting the same associations that gave life to a 1914 sketch for this scene, made when the Paterson Strike was still resonant. In 1932 Bluemner had more reason than ever to identify with the failed hopes of the immigrant workers "imprisoned in factory walls." When he painted *Triad Brilliant* his financial situation was dismal. By 1934 Bluemner, like many American workers, was surviving only with the help of assistance from the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). However, it is equally important to note that his return to the subject of "the Red City" in *Triad Brilliant* was less a political and nationalistic statement than an act of poetic transcendence. The primary aim of the painting was the common goal of the "Compositions for Color Themes": to use the formal elements of painting to project "an esthetic-psychological state of mind, a mood" in a manner analogous to music.³⁹

In one of his most telling statements, Bluemner wrote in 1929 that the ultimate goal of the artist was "to render a scene as if it were a person . . . since all turns on ego, landscape painting is semi self-portraiture; it is a poem." Jeffrey Hayes's analysis of the 1933 *Self-Portrait* uses the artist's own words to demonstrate that the reverse is also true. Bluemner's self-portrait is a sort of landscape where hair, brow, and eyes are analogous to "foliage," "cliffs," and "pools." The artist or individual seeks escape in the blue sky, "away from all money slavery and slave drivers." The central column of red is also "the sunlit wall of a small owner's lot in a free country." Aspects of the self-portrait emphasize his status as a German (presented frontally in the manner of Albrecht Dürer's famous Munich *Self-Portrait at 28* (1500) and as an American framed by the colors of the flag.



In his autobiographical notes, Bluemner refers to himself as "Emigrant" and "Sufferer in sweatshops." If we apply this imagery to *Triad Brilliant* or to the earlier versions of *Silmills*, these works become metaphors for the artist himself as struggling worker and oppressed immigrant.⁴⁰

In a 1951 statement about *Paterson*, William Carlos Williams discusses his use of both the topography and the history of the city to embody the condition of modern man, but says that ultimately "the poem is also the search of the poet for his language, his own language."⁴¹ Bluemner, like Williams, depended on scenes such as Paterson to provide the wellspring of his expression. The political history of Paterson and his sympathy for the textile workers made "the Red City" a perfect icon for the American experience of the immigrant artist, the Vermillionaire who sought to transpose the "red as poor-man's flesh" into a higher, transcendent key.

Notes

Preliminary versions of portions of this paper were presented at the Southeast College Art Conference in 1996 and the American Culture Association in 1998.

1 Both poet and painter used a spare, expressive modernist idiom that Alfred Stieglitz and his circle fostered. Quotations from *Paterson* are from the revised edition prepared by Christopher McGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992), p. 37; for "A

Statement by William Carlos Williams about the Poem *Paterson*, see xiii. The connection between Williams and the Stieglitz circle is extensively explored in Bram Dijkstra's *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969).

2 For dates and biographical information on Bluemner throughout this study, see Jeffrey R. Hayes, *Oscar Bluemner* (New

York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991). Also see summary chronologies provided in Hayes's *Oscar Bluemner: Landscapes of Sorrow and Joy* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1988), pp. 84–85; and Ruth Ginsburg's "Chronology" in *Oscar Bluemner: The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), pp. 15–17. In *Oscar Bluemner* Hayes offers a comprehensive bibliography on the artist.

- 3 Bluemner, "Observations in Black and White," *Camera Work*, no. 47 (July 1914 [published January 1915]), p. 53.
- 4 For *Old Barn at Sheepshead Bay*, see Hayes, *Bluemner*, plate I, and pp. 33–34. For the various drawings of *Silmills* in the "Painting Diary," see Hayes, *Bluemner*, pp. 32–36, 77–78. The studies discussed by Hayes are in the Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. [henceforth AAA], reel 339, frames 64, 69, 369. There are also two additional sketches, not illustrated in Hayes, reel 339, frame 367.
- 5 Hayes, *Oscar Bluemner*, p. 68; for a complete listing and discussion of the group of works shown at 291, see Hayes, *Bluemner*, pp. 60–70. Although Hayes gives the dates of the oil painting *Expression of a Silktown* as 1913–15, a series of drawings of the subject in Bluemner's papers include the notation "Paterson Bild 1911–March 7–16" (Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 343, frame 21). This notation suggests that Bluemner may have continued to rework the subject even after the 291 exhibition.
- 6 The passage quoted comes from the "Painting Diary," Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 28.
- 7 Bluemner turned down a one-hundred-dollar offer for the "15 x 20 Charcoal Drawing of the Canal at Garrett Mountain" shown at 291 (Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frame 854), probably because he wanted to retain the drawing as a basis for reworking the oil. He later did a second black-and-white study, turning the composition upside-down to strengthen the formal elements of line, shape, and value contrast. In his 1916 "Painting Diary" he notes that he has "worked over" the charcoal study published in the *Sun* to produce this second, sketchier charcoal (Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 370). The location of the charcoal drawing is unknown.
- 8 Bluemner seems to have begun the watercolor somewhat tentatively in ink and colored pencil; its execution on the back of an advertising flyer suggests that it was not originally intended to be a highly finished work. Clearly the artist saw the work as something special despite its humble support, because he carefully painted a mat for it that used a thin inner border of intense blue against a wider strip of black to intensify the colors.
- 9 For sections of Bluemner's "Painting Diary" that cover the various versions of *Silmills*, see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frames 64–86, frames 367–70, frames 422–24, and frames 489–96. The quotation is from the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 343, frame 1360.
- 10 Georgia O'Keeffe and later Stieglitz portrayed the dramatic vistas of skyscrapers they saw from the windows of their apartment in the Sheldon Hotel. For a recent discussion of the exploration of Manhattan and, later, of the remote wilderness of New Mexico by Stieglitz's circle, see Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924–34* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2001), especially chapters 6 and 7. The quotation is from the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 77.
- 11 Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 76.
- 12 In addition to the charcoal sketch illustrated in McBride's review, a reproduction of the oil painting of *Silmills* illustrates a review by E. W. Powell; see "In Art Studios and Galleries," (clipping from unidentified source included in the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frame 724), where it is titled *Landscape as "Concave Form."*
- 13 For clippings of McBride's reviews, see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frames 686 and 742. Although Bluemner lived in several nearby New Jersey towns, he never actually lived in Paterson; McBride's assumption that he did indicates how closely he identified the artist with the labor and immigrant controversies there.
- 14 Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frames 753 and 723. The second critic is Powell.
- 15 Translated by Hayes, *Oscar Bluemner*, p. 2, from J. Kr., "Der Spaziergänger . . . —Blümner, seine Ziele, sein Werk—Interessants Interview," (*New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung [Abendblatt]*, 19 November 1915).
- 16 On the Paterson work force, see John A. Herbst and Catherine Keene, *Life and Times in Silk City: A Photographic Essay of Paterson, New Jersey* (Haledon, N. J., American Labor Museum, 1984), pp. 36–38. Information on Karl Bluemner is from the author's interview with Vera Bluemner Kouba, 1 June 1994. For correspondence about the Elberfeld exhibition as well as checklists and reviews by German critics, see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frames 392–412.
- 17 For the passages and phrases, see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 170; reel 343, frame 7 (author's translation); reel 339, frame 424. He speaks of flattening the motif to emphasize "pattern rather than perspective," and repeating the tones of the "blue flat sky" in the rooftops and thus "interweaving the picture"; see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frame 492.
- 18 Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 339, frames 77–78.
- 19 For the relation of the Armory Show and the strike pageant, see Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988).
- 20 On Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, see Green, *New York 1913*, p. 82. For a pictorial history of Paterson, see Herbst and Keene, *Life and Times in Silk City*; for the city as a paradigm of modern urban woes, consult Christopher Norwood, *About Paterson: The Making and Unmaking of an American City* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and for the silk industry in Paterson, see *Silk City: Studies on the Paterson Silk Industry, 1860–1940* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1985).
- 21 For the history and analysis of the alliance and the pageant, see (in addition to Green, *New York 1913*), Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1988); and Anne Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987). For a somewhat eccentric first-hand account, see Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936; reprinted Albuquerque, New Mexico: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1985), pp. 203–12.

- 22 Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, p. 153.
- 23 See Joyce L. Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1988), p. 201; and Linda Nochlin, "The Paterson Strike Pageant of 1913," *Art in America* 62 (May–June 1974): 64.
- 24 For a closer look at the strike pageant, see "The Pageant of the Paterson Strike" in Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, p. 210.
- 25 On the pageant review from the *Herald Tribune*, 8 June 1913, see Nochlin, "Paterson Strike Pageant," p. 65. For Bluemner and the theater, see Frank Gettings, "The Human Landscape: Subjective Symbolism in Oscar Bluemner's Painting," *Archives of American Art Journal* 19 (1979): 9–14. Judith Zilczer has suggested that the affinities between Bluemner's work and stage sets may be traced to his early architectural assignments of designing prefabricated stage sets for the World's Columbian Exposition; see Zilczer, "Oscar Bluemner's Expressionist Landscape Drawings," *Drawing* 1 (November–December 1979): 77. Genauer's comment from the *New York World Telegram* (12 January 1935) is reprinted in "What the Critics Say . . ." in *Oscar Florianus Bluemner* (Minneapolis: University Gallery, Univ. of Minnesota, 1939), unpaginated.
- 26 Williams, *Paterson*, p. 43. For a brief account of the Lambert family, their castle, and their collections, see Herbst and Keene, *Life and Times in Silk City*, pp. 18–22, 28–35.
- 27 Angelica Santomauro, director of the American Labor Museum, pointed out to me the similarity of the view seen in *Silk-mills* to that originally visible from the Botto House balcony.
- 28 Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 341, frames 1097–98.
- 29 Oscar Bluemner, "Recent Visitor Here Finds Reading Fascinating City," clipping in the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frame 808.
- 30 For an analysis of Bluemner's artistic relationships with German art and theory and a close look at the specifics of his 1912 visit to Germany, see Patricia McDonnell, *American Artists in Expressionist Berlin: Ideological Crosscurrents in the Early Modernism of America and Germany, 1905–1915* (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1991). For the episode of the arrest, see Hayes, *Bluemner*, p. 72. The comments on the suspicious neighbors come from the author's interview with Vera Bluemner Kouba, 7 July 1994. Bluemner apparently wrote to the Department of the Navy about his concern that he was being investigated. The reply was a somewhat ambiguous denial, quoting his neighbors who had indicated that "it was advisable you be investigated"; see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frame 43.
- 31 For Caffin's comments, see *The New York American*, clipping in the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 338, frame 687. For the German critics' remarks, see "Oscar Bluemner: A Chronology," in *Oscar Florianus Bluemner*, unpaginated.
- 32 "The Vermillionaire," *University Review* (summer 1939): 250, quoted by Hayes, *Bluemner*, pp. 40–41.
- 33 Stieglitz's inquiries about Bluemner's citizenship come from the author's interview with Vera Bluemner Kouba, 7 July 1994. For the Stieglitz group obsession with "the word 'American,'" see Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing*:
- Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999), p. 15. Bluemner's comment is quoted from a letter to Neumann of 10 February 1930; see the J. B. Neumann Papers, Archives of American Art, in *The Golden Door: Artist-Immigrants of America, 1876–1976* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1976), p. 114.
- 34 "What is American Art—A Reader's Forum of Opinion," *New York Times*, 27 November 1932
- 35 See Hayes, *Landscape of Sorrow and Joy*, p. 72. For Bluemner's notes on *Triad Brilliant*, see the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 340, frames 2173–74, 2183–84.
- 36 See Connor, *Democratic Visions*, especially pp. 150, 167, 171, 181, and 191. For the O'Keeffe interview, see Corn, *Great American Thing*, p. 239; she discusses *Cow's Skull* at length on pp. 245–49. Hayes in *Oscar Bluemner* devotes an important chapter to an elaborate explication of the *Self-Portrait* (see pp. 175–82). He does not mention the connection to O'Keeffe's painting.
- 37 For references to "flag day," see Golin, *Fragile Bridge*, pp. 81–82.
- 38 Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 340, frame 2184.
- 39 Oscar Bluemner, "Introduction," *Oscar Florianus Bluemner*, unpaginated.
- 40 Hayes, *Bluemner*, pp. 175–82. Quotations from Bluemner about the *Self-Portrait* are found in the Oscar Bluemner Papers, AAA, reel 340, frames 2234–38.
- 41 "A Statement by William Carlos Williams about the Poem *Paterson*," *Paterson*, xiv.